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ABSTRACT

The Iowa State Department of Public Instruction has developed an instructional materials selection policy and procedures to help achieve appropriate assignment of selection responsibility and quality selection while guarding against unwarranted censorship of materials. The model emphasized the ongoing nature of media selection, involving assignment of responsibility of selection and continued evaluation by school staff members. Intended to provide assistance to schools in developing their own selection policies and procedures, the model delineates: (1) responsibility of selection of materials; (2) criteria for selection of materials; (3) procedures for selection of media and text materials; (4) procedures for objections by the community; and (5) a sample form for reevaluation of printed or audiovisual material. Sources of publications and associations concerned with intellectual freedom are appended. (HB)

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Selection of Instructional Materials

A Model Policy and Rules

IR002936

A Service of Your DPI

October 1975

MODEL POLICY AND RULES, WITH COMMENTS, FOR ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL BOARDS IN SELECTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

IMPORTANT: THIS IS A MODEL ONLY

This model contains numerous ethical, educational and legal judgments. Do not accept any portion of this model as local policy or rules until after full and sufficient consideration. It is always wise to have proposed local policies and regulations reviewed by legal counsel.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Des Moines, Iowa
October, 1975
SP 18258

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Introduction

For a number of years the State Department of Public Instruction has demonstrated its concern for careful selection of library media and text materials and for intellectual freedom for teachers and students. In 1968 the Department cosponsored a conference concerned with censorship and selection with the Iowa Association of School Librarians. A paper developed for the conference, "Selection Policies for School Libraries," was printed and distributed by the Department. In 1971 the Department of Public Instruction began distribution of "Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials," a paper published by the American Association of School Librarians. And in 1973 the Department began helping with the distribution of Intellectual Freedom Do-line,, published by the Iowa Library Association and the Iowa Educational Media Association (The Iowa Association of School Librarians mentioned above merged with the Audiovisual Education Association of Iowa to form the latter group).

Both before and since the distribution of these documents the Department has advocated the establishment of selection policy and procedures to help achieve appropriate assignment of selection responsibility, and quality selection, and to guard against unwarranted censorship of materials.

Now the Department offers its own model for such policy and procedures statements, emphasizing the ongoing nature of selection, involving assignment of responsibility of selection and continued evaluation by school staff members and providing for appropriate consideration of community concerns.

Local school officials and staffs have responsibility to provide this type of protection and assurance for the schools and communities. The model is intended to provide assistance to schools in developing their own selection policies and procedures.

Model Policy and Rules for Selection of Instructional Media

It is of the utmost importance that a delineation be made between "policy" and "rules." Policy is that general statement of direction given by the board of directors to all concerned. Rule is that procedure developed by the school administration (and under Iowa law, adopted by the Board) by which the policy is to be carried out. Rules detail the application of policy to specific circumstances. Proposed policies and rules should always be reviewed by legal counsel.

This model should not be presented for verbatim adoption. It is offered only for local consideration.

Model Statement of Policy

The Board of Directors of the _____ School District hereby declares it the policy of the District to provide a wide range of instructional materials on all levels of difficulty, with diversity of appeal, and the presentation of different points of view and to allow review of allegedly inappropriate instructional materials.

Legal Reference: Code of Iowa § 279.8
Ch. 301

Model Statement of Rules

I. Responsibility for Selection of Materials

A. The Board of Directors is legally responsible for all matters relating to the operation of the _____ School District.

B. The responsibility for the selection of instructional materials is delegated to the professionally trained and certificated staff employed by the school system. For the purposes of this rule the term "instructional materials" includes printed and audiovisual materials (not equipment), whether considered text materials or media center materials.

C. While selection of materials involves many people (principals, teachers, students, supervisors, community persons and media specialists), the responsibility for coordinating the selection of most instructional materials and making the recommendation for purchase rests with certificated media personnel. For the purpose of this rule the term "media specialist" includes librarians, school media specialists or other appropriately certificated persons responsible for selection of media.

D. Responsibility for coordinating the selection of text materials for distribution to classes will rest with the appropriate department chairperson or with the Textbook Evaluation Committee. For the purpose of this rule the term "text materials" includes textbooks and other print and nonprint material provided in multiple copies for use of a total class or a major segment of such a class.

II. Criteria for Selection of Materials

A. The following criteria will be used as they apply:

1. Materials shall support and be consistent with the general educational goals of the district and the objectives of specific courses.

2. Materials shall meet high standards of quality in factual content and presentation.

3. Materials shall be appropriate for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, and social development of the students for whom the materials are selected.

4. Materials shall have aesthetic, literary, or social value.

5. Materials chosen shall be by competent and qualified authors and producers.

6. Materials shall be chosen to foster respect for minority groups, women, and ethnic groups and shall realistically represent our pluralistic society, along with the roles and life styles open to both men and women in today's world. Materials shall be designed to help students gain an awareness and understanding of the many important contributions made to our civilization by minority groups, ethnic groups and women.

Materials shall clarify the multiple historical and contemporary forces with their economic, political, and religious dimensions which have operated to the disadvantage or advantage of women, minority groups, and ethnic groups. These materials shall present and analyze intergroup tension and conflict objectively, placing emphasis upon resolving social and economic problems.

Materials shall be designed to motivate students and staff to examine their own attitudes and behaviors and to comprehend their own duties, responsibilities, rights and privileges as participating citizens in a pluralistic, non-sexist society.

7. Materials shall be selected for their strengths rather than rejected for their weaknesses.

8. Biased or slanted materials may be provided to meet specific curriculum objectives.

9. Physical format and appearance of materials shall be suitable for their intended use.

B. The selection of materials on controversial issues will be directed toward maintaining a balanced collection representing various views.

III. Procedure for Selection

A. Media

1. In selecting materials for purchase for the media center, the media specialist will evaluate the existing collection and the curriculum needs and will consult reputable, professionally prepared selection aids and other appropriate sources. For the purposes of this rule the term "media" includes all materials considered part of the library collection, plus all instructional materials housed in resource centers and classrooms

(if any) which are not text materials. For the purpose of this rule, the term "media center" is the space, room or complex of rooms and spaces designated as a library, media center, instructional materials center or similar term. It may include units not contiguous to the center where facilities dictate. These units would include but not be limited to resource centers, production centers, and television studios.

2. Recommendations for purchase will be solicited from faculty and student body.

3. Gift materials shall be judged by the criteria in Section II and shall be accepted or rejected by those criteria.

4. Selection is an ongoing process which should include the removal of materials no longer appropriate and the replacement of lost and worn materials still of educational value.

5. Selections are forwarded to the office of the superintendent or his or her designee (e.g., the district media director or the business manager) through the principal or other person in charge of the attendance center for purchase throughout the year.

B. Text Material

1. Text materials committees shall be appointed at the time that text adoption areas are determined. Appropriate subject area, instructional level, and media personnel shall be included in each committee.

2. Criteria for text materials consistent with the general criteria for materials selection noted in Section II shall be developed by teacher committees.

3. The committee shall present its recommendation(s) to the superintendent or other designated administrator.

4. The superintendent or his or her designee and the text materials committee shall present the recommendation(s) to the board.

IV. Objection:

A. Any resident of the school district may raise objection to instructional materials used in the district's educational program despite the fact that the individuals selecting such material were duly qualified to make the selection and followed the proper procedure and observed the criteria for selecting such material.

1. The school official or staff member receiving a complaint regarding instructional materials shall try to resolve the issue informally. The materials shall remain in use unless removed through the procedure in Section IV. B. 6. e. of this rule.

a. The school official or staff member initially receiving a complaint shall explain to the complainant the school's selection procedure, criteria, and qualifications of those persons selecting the material.

b. The school official or staff member initially receiving a complaint shall explain to the best of his or her ability the particular place the objected to material occupies in the educational program, its intended educational usefullness, and additional information regarding its use, or refer the complaining party to someone who can identify and explain the use of the material.

(Comment: The vast majority of complaints can be amicably disposed of in the first stages when the school officials and staff are frequently reminded of the school's procedures. A quick personal conference can often times solve the problem where a shift into a more formal procedure might inflate the problem. While the legal right to object to materials is not expressly stated, it is implied in such provisions as the right to petition the government for redress of grievances.)

2. In the event that the person making an objection to material is not satisfied with the initial explanation, the person raising the question should be referred to someone designated by the principal or person in charge of the attendance center to handle such complaints or to the media specialist for that attendance center. If, after private counseling, the complainant desires to file a formal complaint, the person to whom the complainant has been referred will assist in filling out a Reconsideration Request Form in full.

3. The individual receiving the initial complaint shall advise the principal or person in charge of the attendance center where the challenged material is being used, of the initial contact no later than the end of the following school day, whether or not the complainant has apparently been satisfied by the initial contact. A written record of the contact shall be maintained by the principal or other person in charge of the attendance center.

4. The principal or other person in charge of each attendance center shall review the selection and objection rules with the staff at least annually. The staff shall be reminded that the right to object to materials is one granted by policies enacted by the Board of Directors and firmly entrenched in law. They shall also be reminded of ethical and practical considerations in attempting to handle resident complaints with courtesy and integrity.

B. Request for Reconsideration

1. Any resident or employee of the school district may formally challenge instructional materials used in the district's educational program on the basis of appropriateness. This procedure is for the purpose of considering the opinions of those persons in the schools and the community who are not directly involved in the selection process.

2. Each attendance center and the school district's central office will keep on hand and make available Reconsideration Request Forms. All formal objections to instructional materials must be made on this form.

3. The Reconsideration Request Form shall be signed by the complainant and filed with the Superintendent or someone so designated by the Superintendent.

4. Within five business days of the filing of the form, the Superintendent or person so designated by the Superintendent shall file the material in question with the Reconsideration Committee for re-evaluation. The Committee shall recommend disposition to the office of the Superintendent.

5. Generally, access to challenged material shall not be restricted during the reconsideration process. However, in unusual circumstances, the material may be removed temporarily by following the provisions of Section IV. B. 6. e. of this rule.

6. The Reconsideration Committee

a. The Reconsideration Committee shall be made up of eleven members.

(1) One teacher designated annually by the Superintendent.

(2) One school media specialist designated annually by the Superintendent.

(3) One member of the central administrative staff designated annually by the Superintendent. (This position will normally be filled by the supervisor or person responsible for the district's media services.)

(4) Five members from the community appointed annually by the Executive Committee of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association.

(5) Three high school students, selected annually from and by the Student Advisory Committee.

(Comment: Subsections (4) and (5) represent a departure from the traditional approaches of handling challenged school materials and may well be the key to the success or failure of this model. A committee with a majority of lay members should be viewed by the community as being objective and not automatically supportive of prior professional decisions on selection. Much of the philosophy regarding the Committee structure was borrowed from the policy of the Cedar Rapids Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Use of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association in this model is merely illustrative. Whether the non-educators are selected from the P.T.S.A. or other groups interested in the community's schools is not important. The important thing is the establishment and maintenance of the Committee's credibility with the community through a majority of nonprofessionals. An appointed committee will generally be more objective than a voluntary committee.

The method of selecting students for the Committee will depend greatly upon the size and organization of the district. A district with several high schools may want to have one student from each on the Committee while a district with one high school may want one student representative from each grade. Student selection of the representatives to this Committee is very important. Any responsible student group or groups may be used when a Student Advisory Committee does not exist in the district.)

b. The chairperson of the Committee shall not be an employee or officer of the District. The secretary shall be an employee or officer of the District.

(Comment: It is vital to the operation of this model that a community member chair the Reconsideration Committee. Credibility is the watchword.)

c. The Committee shall first meet each year during the third week in September at a time and place designated by the Superintendent and made known to the members of the Committee at least three school days in advance.

d. A calendar of subsequent regular meetings for the year shall be established and a chairperson and a secretary selected at the first meeting.

(Comment: While many districts may not feel the need to hold regular, perhaps monthly meetings, it is important to establish a sense of continuity and regularity about the Committee. The notoriety and excitement caused by emergency meetings when challenges arise in a community may be the unnecessary fuel to cause an ordinary healthy situation to become distorted beyond proportion. It is wiser to cancel unnecessary meetings than to call unexpected ones. Lack of frequent challenges to school materials probably means that one or more of the following is present: (1) satisfaction with the selection process, (2) lack of community interest, (3) belief in the futility of communication with school district officials, or (4) undue influence on the selection and weeding processes.)

e. Special meetings may be called by the Superintendent to consider temporary removal of materials in unusual circumstances. Temporary removal shall require a three-fourths vote of the Committee.

f. The calendar of regular meetings and notice of special meetings shall be made public through appropriate student publications and other communications methods.

g. The Committee shall receive all Reconsideration Request Forms from the Superintendent or person designated by the Superintendent.

h. The procedure for the first meeting following receipt of a Reconsideration Request Form is as follows:

(1) Distribute copies of written request form.

(2) Give complainant or a group spokesperson an opportunity to talk about and expand on the request form.

(3) Distribute reputable, professionally prepared reviews of the material when available.

(4) Distribute copies of challenged material as available.

i. At a subsequent meeting, interested persons, including the complainant, may have the opportunity to share their views. The Committee may request that individuals with special knowledge be present to give information to the committee.

j. The complainant shall be kept informed by the Secretary concerning the status of his or her complaint throughout the Committee reconsideration process. The complainant and known interested parties shall be given appropriate notice of such meetings.

k. At the second or a subsequent meeting, as desired, the Committee shall make its decision in either open or closed session. The Committee's final decision will be, (1) to take no removal action, (2) to remove all or part of the challenged material from the total school environment, or (3) to limit the educational use of the challenged material. The sole criteria for the final decision is the appropriateness of the material for its intended educational use. The vote on the decision shall be by secret ballot. The written decision and its justification shall be forwarded to the Superintendent for appropriate action, the complainant and the appropriate attendance centers.

(Comment: The state open meeting law should be reviewed for its application to this provision.)

l. A decision to sustain a challenge shall not be interpreted as a judgment of irresponsibility on the part of the professionals involved in the original selection or use of the material.

m. Requests to reconsider materials which have previously been before the Committee must receive approval of a majority of the Committee members before the materials will again be reconsidered. Every Reconsideration Request Form shall be acted upon by the Committee.

n. In the event of a severe overload of challenges, the Committee may appoint a subcommittee of members or nonmembers to consolidate challenges and to make recommendations to the full Committee. The composition of this subcommittee shall approximate the representation on the full Committee.

o. Committee members directly associated with the selection, use, or challenge of the challenged material shall be excused from the Committee during the deliberation on such materials. The Superintendent may appoint a temporary replacement for the excused Committee member, but such replacement shall be of the same general qualifications of that person excused.

(Comment: The Committee should never be placed in the position of appearing to defend itself, its members, or the school staff. The Committee must maintain a nonadversarial position.)

p. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision, he or she may request that the matter be placed on the agenda of the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Board.

(Comment: These requests should comply with existing board policy and rules regarding the board agenda.)

q. Any person dissatisfied with the decision of the Board may appeal to the State Board of Public Instruction pursuant to state law.

(Comment: Subsections p. and q. are implicit and expressly provided for respectively, in Iowa law. Some persons might feel that it would be more appropriate to not use p. and q. as they may encourage appeals. The provisions of q. would not be applicable to decisions of A.E.A. Boards, but would be applicable to decisions of Area Community Technical College Boards and School District Boards.)

FORM I

RECONSIDERATION REQUEST FORM
REQUEST FOR REEVALUATION OF PRINTED OR AUDIOVISUAL MATERIAL
SUBMIT TO SUPERINTENDENT

Book or other printed material if applicable:

Author _____ Hardcover ____ Paperback ____ Other ____

Title _____

Publisher (if known) _____ Date of Publication _____

Audiovisual Material if applicable:

Title _____

Producer (if known) _____

Type of Material (filmstrip, motion picture, etc.) _____

Request initiated by _____

Telephone _____ Address _____

City _____ Zone _____

School(s) in which item is used _____

Person making the request represents her/himself group or organization

Name of group _____

Address of group _____

_____

_____

1. To what in the item do you object: (Please be specific; cite pages, or frames, etc.)

_____

_____

2. In your opinion what harmful effects upon pupils might result from use of this item?

_____

_____

_____

3. Do you perceive any instructional value in the use of this item? _____

_____

4. Did you review the entire item? If not, what sections did you review? _____

_____

5. Should the opinion of any additional experts in the field be considered?

_____ Yes Please list suggestions if any: _____

_____

_____ No

6. In the place of this item would you care to recommend other material which you consider to be of equal or superior quality for the purpose intended? _____

_____

7. Do you wish to make an oral presentation to the Review Committee?

_____ Yes (a) Please call the office of the Superintendent _____
Telephone No.

(b) Please be prepared at this time to indicate the approximate length of time your presentation will require.

_____ No

_____ _____
DATE SIGNATURE

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE RECONSIDERATION COMMITTEE

The policy of this school district related to selection of learning materials states that any resident of the district may formally challenge instructional materials used in the district's educational program. This policy allows those persons in the school and the community who are not directly involved in the selection of materials to make their opinions known. The task of the Reconsideration Committee is to provide an open forum for discussion of challenged materials and to make an informed decision on the challenge.

The most critical component of the reconsideration process is the establishment and maintenance of the Committee's credibility in the community. For this purpose, the Committee is composed primarily of community members. The community should not, therefore, infer that the Committee is biased or is obligated to uphold prior professional decisions. For this same reason, a community member will be selected to chair the Committee.

The presence on the Committee of the school media specialist and the administrative staff member will assure continuity from year to year as well as lend professional knowledge of the selection process. Student members are essential since they are the closest to the student body and will be immediately affected by the decision of the Committee.

The reconsideration process, the task of this Committee, is just one part of the selection continuum. Material is purchased to meet a need. It is reviewed and examined, if possible, prior to purchase; it is periodically reevaluated through updating, discarding, or reexamination. The Committee must be ready to acknowledge that an error in selection may have been made despite this process. Librarians and school personnel regularly read great numbers of reviews in the selection process, and occasional errors are possible.

In reconsidering challenged materials, the role of the Committee, and particularly the chairperson, is to produce a climate for disagreement. However, the Committee should begin by finding items of agreement, keeping in mind that the larger the group participating, the greater the amount of information available and, therefore, the greater the number of possible approaches to the problem.

If the complainant chooses, he may make an oral presentation to the Committee to expand and elaborate on the complaint. The Committee will listen to the complainant, to those with special knowledge, and any other interested persons. In these discussions, the Committee should be aware of relevant social pressures which are affecting the situation. Individuals who may try to dominate or impose a decision must not be allowed to do so. Minority viewpoints expressed by groups or individuals must be heard, and observers must be made to feel welcome. It is important that the Committee create a calm, nonvolatile environment in which to deal with a potentially volatile situation. To this end, the complainant will be kept continuously informed of the progress of his complaint.

The Committee will listen to the views of all interested persons before reaching a decision. In deliberating its decision, the Committee should remember that the school system must be responsive to the needs, tastes, and opinions of the community it serves. Therefore, the Committee must distinguish between broad community sentiment and attempts to impose personal standards. The deliberations should concentrate on the appropriateness of the material. The question to be answered by the Committee is, "Is the material appropriate for its designated audience at this time?"

The Committee's final decision will be (1) to remove the challenged material from the total school environment, (2) to take no removal action, or (3) to agree on a limitation of the educational use of the materials. The decision will be reached through secret ballot.

The Committee chairperson will instruct the secretary to convey the Committee's decision to the office of the Superintendent. The decision should detail the rationale on which it was based. A letter will be sent to the complainant outlining the Committee's final decision.

SOURCES
PUBLICATIONS

Many of the sources and organizations cited here were of assistance to the Committee preparing this policy and procedures model.

American Association of School Librarians. Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials. Chicago: The Association, 1970 (Under revision 1975).

American Association of School Librarians. School Library Bill of Rights for School Library Media Programs. Chicago: The Association, 1969 (Under revision 1975).

American Library Association. Library Bill of Rights. Chicago: The Association, 1967.

American Library Association, Office of Intellectual Freedom. Intellectual Freedom Manual. Chicago: The Association, 1974.

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Boyer, Calvin J. and Nancy L. Eaton. Book Selection Policies in American Libraries, An Anthology of Policies from College, Public and School Libraries. Austin, Texas: Armadillo Press, 1971.

Cedar Rapids Community Schools. Policy, Administrative Regulations and Departmental Guidelines: Materials Selection. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Cedar Rapids Community Schools, 1975.

Censorship, a joint publication. Sponsored by American Association of School Administrators, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Association of Elementary School Principals, and National Association of Secondary School Principals. Washington, D. C. ASCD, 1975.

Iowa Association of School Librarians, Professional Relations Committee. Selection Policies for School Libraries. Des Moines: State of Iowa, Department of Public Instruction, 1968.

National Council of Teachers of English. The Students' Right to Read. Urbana, Illinois: The Council, 1972.

ASSOCIATIONS CONCERNED WITH INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

American Library Association, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

American Association of School Librarians (Division of ALA)

Office of Intellectual Freedom (ALA)

American Civil Liberties Union, 22 E. 40th Street, New York City 10016

Iowa Council of Teachers of English. Contact Jack Marcum, Grinnell High School, Grinnell, Iowa 50112

Iowa Library Association, 418 Seventh Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309

Iowa Educational Media Association. Contact Marjean Wegner, Urbandale High School, Urbandale, Iowa 50322

National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801